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GEORGE W. BUSH

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Press Conference of the President

The East Room

[en Espanol](#)

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THE PRESIDENT: Good evening. Tonight I will discuss two vital priorities for the American people, and then I'd be glad to answer some of your questions.

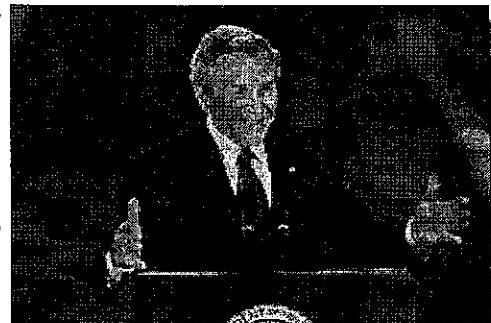
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President's Remarks

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Millions of American families and small businesses are hurting because of higher gasoline prices. My administration is doing everything we can to make gasoline more affordable. In the near-term, we will continue to encourage oil producing nations to maximize their production. Here at home, we'll protect consumers. There will be no price gouging at gas pumps in America.

We must address the root causes that are driving up gas prices. Over the past decade, America's energy consumption has been growing about 40 times faster than our energy production. That means we're relying more on energy produced abroad. To reduce our dependence on foreign sources of energy, we must take four key steps. First, we must better use technology to become better conservers of energy. Secondly, we must find innovative and environmentally sensitive ways to make the most of our existing energy resources, including oil, natural gas, coal and safe, clean nuclear power.



Third, we must develop promising new sources of energy, such as hydrogen, ethanol or biodiesel. Fourth, we must help growing energy consumers overseas, like China and India, apply new technologies to use energy more efficiently, and reduce global demand of fossil fuels. I applaud the House for passing a good energy bill. Now the Senate needs to act on this urgent priority. American consumers have waited long enough. To help reduce our dependence on foreign sources of energy, Congress needs to get an energy bill to my desk by this summer so I can sign it into law.

Congress also needs to address the challenges facing Social Security. I've traveled the country to talk with the American people. They understand that Social Security is headed for serious financial trouble, and they expect their leaders in Washington to address the problem.

Social Security worked fine during the last century, but the math has changed. A generation of baby boomers is getting ready to retire. I happen to be one of them. Today there are about 40 million retirees receiving benefits; by the time all the baby boomers have retired, there will be more than 72 million retirees drawing Social Security benefits. Baby boomers will be living longer and collecting benefits over long retirements than previous generations. And Congress has ensured that their benefits will rise faster than the rate of inflation.

In other words, there's a lot of us getting ready to retire who will be living longer and receiving greater benefits than the previous generation. And to compound the problem, there are fewer people paying into the system. In 1950, there were 16 workers for every beneficiary; today there are 3.3 workers for every beneficiary; soon there will be two workers for every beneficiary.

These changes have put Social Security on the path to bankruptcy. When the baby boomers start retiring in three years, Social Security



will start heading toward the red. In 2017, the system will start paying out more in benefits than it collects in payroll taxes. Every year after that the shortfall will get worse, and by 2041, Social Security will be bankrupt.

Franklin Roosevelt did a wonderful thing when he created Social Security. The system has meant a lot for a lot of people. Social Security has provided a safety net that has provided dignity and peace of mind for millions of Americans in their retirement. Yet there's a hole in the safety net because Congresses have made promises it cannot keep for a younger generation.

As we fix Social Security, some things won't change: Seniors and people with disabilities will get their checks; all Americans born before 1950 will receive the full benefits.

Our duty to save Social Security begins with making the system permanently solvent, but our duty does not end there. We also have a responsibility to improve Social Security, by directing extra help to those most in need and by making it a better deal for younger workers. Now, as Congress begins work on legislation, we must be guided by three goals. First, millions of Americans depend on Social Security checks as a primary source of retirement income, so we must keep this promise to future retirees, as well. As a matter of fairness, I propose that future generations receive benefits equal to or greater than the benefits today's seniors get.

Secondly, I believe a reform system should protect those who depend on Social Security the most. So I propose a Social Security system in the future where benefits for low-income workers will grow faster than benefits for people who are better off. By providing more generous benefits for low-income retirees, we'll make this commitment: If you work hard and pay into Social Security your entire life, you will not retire into poverty. This reform would solve most of the funding challenges facing Social Security. A variety of options are available to solve the rest of the problem, and I will work with Congress on any good-faith proposal that does not raise the payroll tax rate or harm our economy. I know we can find a solution to the financial problems of Social Security that is sensible, permanent, and fair.

Third, any reform of Social Security must replace the empty promises being made to younger workers with real assets, real money. I believe the best way to achieve this goal is to give younger workers the option, the opportunity if they so choose, of putting a portion of their payroll taxes into a voluntary personal retirement account. Because this money is saved and invested, younger workers would have the opportunity to receive a higher rate of return on their money than the current Social Security system can provide.

The money from a voluntary personal retirement account would supplement the check one receives from Social Security. In a reformed Social Security system, voluntary personal retirement accounts would offer workers a number of investment options that are simple and easy to understand. I know some Americans have reservations about investing in the stock market, so I propose that one investment option consist entirely of Treasury bonds, which are backed by the full faith and credit of the United States government.



Options like this will make voluntary personal retirement accounts a safer investment that will allow an American to build a nest egg that he or she can pass on to whomever he or she chooses. Americans who would choose not to save in a personal account would still be able to count on a Social Security check equal to or higher than the benefits of today's seniors.

In the coming days and weeks, I will work with both the House and the Senate as they take the next steps in the legislative process. I'm willing to listen to any good idea from either party.

Too often, the temptation in Washington is to look at a major issue only in terms of whether it gives one political party an advantage over the other. Social Security is too important for "politics as usual." We have a shared responsibility to fix Social Security and make the system better; to keep seniors out of poverty and expand ownership for people of every background. And when we do, Republicans and Democrats will be able to stand together and take credit for doing what is right for our children and our grandchildren.

And now I'll be glad to answer some questions, starting with Terry Hunt.

Q Mr. President, a majority of Americans disapprove of your handling of Social Security, rising gas prices and the economy. Are you frustrated by that and by the fact that you're having trouble gaining traction on your agenda in a Republican-controlled Congress?

THE PRESIDENT: Look, we're asking people to do things that haven't been done for 20 years. We haven't addressed the Social Security problem since 1983. We haven't had an energy strategy in our country for decades. And so I'm not surprised that some are balking at doing hard work. But I have a duty as the President to define problems facing our nation and to call upon people to act. And we're just really getting started in the process.



You asked about Social Security. For the past 60 days, I've traveled our country making it clear to people we have a problem. That's the first step of any legislative process; is to explain to people the nature of the problem, and the American people understand we have a problem.

I've also spent time assuring seniors they'll get their check. That's a very important part of making sure we end up with a Social Security reform. I think if seniors feel like they're not going to get their check, obviously nothing is going to happen.

And we're making progress there, too, Terry, as well. See, once the American people realize there's a problem, then they're going to start asking members of Congress from both parties, why aren't you doing something to fix it? And I am more than willing to sit down with people of both parties to listen to their ideas. Today, I advanced some ideas of moving the process along. And the legislative process is just getting started, and I'm optimistic we'll get something done.

Q Is the poll troubling?

THE PRESIDENT: Polls? You know, if a President tries to govern based upon polls, you're kind of like a dog chasing your tail. I don't think you can make good, sound decisions based upon polls. And I don't think the American people want a President who relies upon polls and focus groups to make decisions for the American people.

Social Security is a big issue, and it's an issue that we must address now. You see, the longer we wait, the more expensive the solution is going to be for a younger generation of Americans. The Social Security trustees have estimated that every year we wait to solve the problem, to fix the hole in the safety net for younger Americans costs about \$600 billion. And so my message to Congress is -- to Congress is, let's do our duty. Let's come together to get this issue solved.

Steve.

Q Your top military officer, General Richard Myers, says the Iraqi insurgency is as strong now as it was a year ago. Why is that the case? And why haven't we been more successful in limiting the violence?

THE PRESIDENT: I think he went on to say we're winning, if I recall. But nevertheless, there are still some in Iraq who aren't happy with democracy. They want to go back to the old days of tyranny and darkness, torture chambers and mass graves. I believe we're making really good progress in Iraq, because the Iraqi people are beginning to see the benefits of a free society. They're beginning -- they saw a government formed today.



The Iraqi military is being trained by our military, and they're

performing much better than the past. The more secure Iraq becomes, as a result of the hard work of Iraqi security forces, the more confident the people will have in the process, and the more isolated the terrorists will become.

But Iraq has – have got people there that are willing to kill, and they're hard-nosed killers. And we will work with the Iraqis to secure their future. A free Iraq in the midst of the Middle East is an important part of spreading peace. It's a region of the world where a lot of folks in the past never thought democracy could take hold. Democracy is taking hold. And as democracy takes hold, peace will more likely be the norm.

In order to defeat the terrorists, in order to defeat their ideology of hate, in the long run, we must spread freedom and hope. Today I talked to the Prime Minister of Iraq. I had a great conversation with him. I told him I was proud of the fact that he was willing to stand up and lead. I told him I appreciated his courage and the courage of those who are willing to serve the Iraqi people in government. I told him, I said, when America makes a commitment, we'll stand by you. I said, I hope you get your constitution written on time, and he agreed. He recognizes it's very important for the Transitional National Assembly to get the constitution written so it can be submitted to the people on time. He understands the need for a timely write of the constitution.

And I also encouraged him to continue to reaching out to disaffected groups in Iraq, and he agreed. I'm really happy to talk to him; I invited him to come to America, I hope he comes soon. There are a lot of courageous people in Iraq, Steve, that are making a big difference in the lives of that country.

I also want to caution you all that it's not easy to go from a tyranny to a democracy. We didn't pass sovereignty but about 10 months ago, and since that time a lot of progress has been made and we'll continue to make progress for the good of the region and for the good of our country.

Gregory. David Gregory.

Q Thank you, sir. Mr. President, recently the head of the Family Research Council said that judicial filibusters are an attack against people of faith. And I wonder whether you believe that, in fact, that is what is nominating [sic] Democrats who oppose your judicial choices? And I wonder what you think generally about the role that faith is playing, how it's being used in our political debates right now?

THE PRESIDENT: I think people are opposing my nominees because they don't like the judicial philosophy of the people I've nominated. Some would like to see judges legislate from the bench. That's not my view of the proper role of a judge.

Speaking about judges, I certainly hope my nominees get an up or down vote on the floor of the Senate. They deserve an up or down vote. I think for the sake of fairness, these good people I've nominated should get a vote. And I'm hoping that will be the case as time goes on.

The role of religion in our society? I view religion as a personal matter. I think a person ought to be judged on how he or she lives his life, or lives her life. And that's how I've tried to live my life, through example. Faith-based is an important part of my life, individually, but I don't – I don't ascribe a person's opposing my nominations to an issue of faith.

Q Do you think that's an inappropriate statement? And what I asked is --

THE PRESIDENT: No, I just don't agree with it.

Q You don't agree with it.

THE PRESIDENT: No, I think people oppose my nominees because – because of judicial philosophy.

Q Sorry, I asked you what you think of the ways faith is being used in our political debates, not just in society --

THE PRESIDENT: No, I know you asked me that. Well, I can only speak to myself, and I am mindful that people in political office should not say to somebody, you're not equally American if you don't happen to agree with my

view of religion. As I said, I think faith is a personal issue, and I get great strength from my faith. But I don't condemn somebody in the political process because they may not agree with me on religion.

The great thing about America, David, is that you should be allowed to worship any way you want, and if you choose not to worship, you're equally as patriotic as somebody who does worship. And if you choose to worship, you're equally American if you're a Christian, a Jew, a Muslim. That's the wonderful thing about our country, and that's the way it should be.

John.

Q Good evening, Mr. President. Several times we've asked you or your aides what you could do about the high price of gasoline, and very often the answer has come back, Congress needs to pass the energy bill. Can you explain for us how, if it were passed, soon after it were introduced, the energy bill would have an effect on the current record price of oil that we're seeing out there?

THE PRESIDENT: John, actually I said in my opening statement that the best way to affect the current price of gasoline is to encourage producing nations to put more crude oil on the market. That's the most effective way, because the price of crude oil determines, in large measure, the price of gasoline. The feed stock for gasoline is crude oil, and when crude oil goes up the price of gasoline goes up. There are other factors, by the way, that cause the price of gasoline to go up, but the main factor is the price of crude oil. And if we can get nations that have got some excess capacity to put crude on the market, the increased supply, hopefully, will meet increased demand, and therefore, take the pressure off price.

Listen, the energy bill is certainly no quick fix. You can't wave a magic wand. I wish I could. It's like that soldier at Fort Hood that said, how come you're not lowering the price of gasoline? I was having lunch with the fellow, and he said, go lower the price of gasoline, President. I said, I wish I could. It just doesn't work that way.

This is a problem that's been a long time in coming. We haven't had an energy policy in this country. And it's going to take us a while to become less dependent on foreign sources of energy. What I've laid out for the Congress to consider is a comprehensive energy strategy that recognizes we need to be better conservers of energy, that recognizes that we can find more energy at home in environmentally friendly ways.

And obviously a contentious issue in front of the Congress is the issue over the ANWR, which is a part of Alaska. ANWR is 19 million acres of land. Technology now enables us to use just 2,000 of that 19 million to be able to explore for oil and gas so we can have oil and gas produced here domestically.

One of the great sources of energy for the future is liquefied natural gas. There's a lot of gas reserves around the world. Gas is -- can only be transported by ship, though, when you liquefy it, when you put it in solid form. We've only got five terminals that are able to receive liquefied natural gas so it can get into our markets. We need more terminals to receive liquefied natural gas from around the world.

We should have an active energy -- nuclear energy policy in America. We've got abundant resources of coal, and we're spending money for clean-coal technology. So these are longer term projects all aimed at making us become less dependent on foreign sources of energy.

Terry.

Q So am I reading correctly that the energy bill would not have had an effect on today's high gasoline --

THE PRESIDENT: Well, it would have 10 years ago. That's exactly what I've been saying to the American people -- 10 years ago if we'd had an energy strategy, we would be able to diversify away from foreign dependence. And -- but we haven't done that. And now we find ourselves in the fix we're in. It's taken us a while to get there, and it's going to take us a while to get out. Hopefully, additional crude oil on the market from countries with some spare capacity will help relieve the price for the American consumers.

Terry.

Q Mr. President, your State Department has reported that terrorist attacks around the world are at an all-time high. If we're winning the war on terrorism, as you say, how do you explain that more people are dying in terrorist attacks on your watch than ever before?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, we've made the decision to defeat the terrorists abroad so we don't have to face them here at home. And when you engage the terrorists abroad, it causes activity and action. And we're relentless. We, the — America and our coalition partners. We understand the stakes, and they're very high because there are people still out there that would like to do harm to the American people.

But our strategy is to stay on the offense, is to keep the pressure on these people, is to cut off their money and to share intelligence and to find them where they hide. And we are making good progress. The al Qaeda network that attacked the United States has been severely diminished. We are slowly but surely dismantling that organization.

In the long run, Terry — like I said earlier -- the way to defeat terror, though, is to spread freedom and democracy. It's really the only way in the long-term. In the short-term, we'll use our troops and assets and agents to find these people and to protect America. But in the long-term, we must defeat the hopelessness that allows them to recruit by spreading freedom and democracy. But we're making progress.

Q So in the near-term you think there will be more attacks and more people dying?

THE PRESIDENT: I'm not going to predict that. In the near-term I can only tell you one thing: we will stay on the offense; we'll be relentless; we'll be smart about how we go after the terrorists; we'll use our friends and allies to go after the terrorists; we will find them where they hide and bring them to justice.

Let me finish with the TV people first. Suzanne. You're not a TV person, Ed -- I know you'd like to be, but -- (laughter.)

Q You'd be surprised. (Laughter.)

THE PRESIDENT: It's a tough industry to get into.

Q Mr. President, it was four years ago when you fist met with Russian President Vladimir Putin. You said you looked into his eyes and you saw his soul. You'll also be meeting with the Russian leader in about a week or so. What do you think of Putin now that he has expressed a willingness to supply weapons to outlaw regimes, specifically his recent comments that he said he would provide short-range missiles to Syria and nuclear components to Iran?

THE PRESIDENT: We have -- first, just on a broader -- kind of in a broader sense, I had a long talk with Vladimir there in Slovakia about democracy and about the importance of democracy. And as you remember, at the press conference -- or if you weren't there, somebody will remember -- he stood up and said he strongly supports democracy. I take him for his word.

I -- and we'll continue to work. Condi just -- Condi Rice, our Secretary of State, just came back and she briefed me that she had a very good discussion with Vladimir about the merits of democracy, about the need to listen to the people and have a government that's responsive.

We're working closely with the Russians on -- on the issue of vehicle-mounted weaponry to Syria. We didn't appreciate that, but we made ourselves clear. As to Iran, what Russia has agreed to do is to send highly enriched uranium to a nuclear civilian power plant, and then collect that uranium after it's used for electricity -- power purposes. That's what they've decided to do.

And I appreciate that gesture. See, what they recognize is that -- what America recognizes, and what Great Britain, France, and Germany recognize, is that we can't trust the Iranians when it comes to enriching uranium; that they should not be allowed to enrich uranium.

And what the Iranians have said was, don't we deserve to have a nuclear power industry just like you do? I've

kind of wondered why they need one since they've got all the oil, but nevertheless, others in the world say, well, maybe that's their right to have their own civilian nuclear power industry. And what Russia has said: Fine, we'll provide you the uranium, we'll enrich it for you and provide it to you, and then we'll collect it. And I appreciate that gesture. I think it's -- so I think Vladimir was trying to help there. I know Vladimir Putin understands the dangers of a Iran with a nuclear weapon. And most of the world understands that, as well.

Wendell.

Q Mr. President, have you asked your ambassador to the U.N., Ambassador John Bolton, about allegations that he acted improperly to subordinates? Do you feel that these allegations warrant your personal intervention? And if they're true, do you feel that they should disqualify him from holding the post, sir?

THE PRESIDENT: Well, John Bolton has been asked the questions about -- about how he handles his business by members of the United States Senate. He's been asked a lot of questions and he's given very good answers. John Bolton is a seasoned diplomat. He's been serving our country for, I think, 20 years. He has been confirmed by the United States Senate four times. In other words, he's been up before the Senate before and they've analyzed his talents and his capabilities and they've confirmed him.

John Bolton is a blunt guy. Sometimes people say I'm a little too blunt. John Bolton can get the job done at the United Nations. It seemed like to me it makes sense to put somebody who's capable, smart, served our country for 20 years, been confirmed by the United States Senate four times, and who isn't afraid to speak his mind in the post of the ambassador to the U.N.

See, the U.N. needs reform. If you're interested in reforming the U.N., like I'm interested in reforming the U.N., it makes sense to put somebody who's skilled and who is not afraid to speak his mind at the United Nations.

Now, I asked John during the interview process in the Oval Office, I said, before I send you up there to the Senate, let me ask you something: do you think the United Nations is important? See, I didn't want to send somebody up there who said, it's not -- it's not worth a darn; I don't think I need to go. He said, no, it's important. But it needs to be reformed.

And I think the United Nations is important. As a matter of fact, I'll give you an example. Today I met with the United Nations representative to Syria, Mr. Larsen. He's an impressive fellow. Now, he's delivered -- to Lebanon, excuse me -- he's delivered a very strong message to the Syrian leader, though, that the world expects President Assad to withdraw not only his military forces, but his intelligence services, completely from Lebanon.

And now he is in charge of following up to make sure it happens. I think that's a very important and useful role for the United Nations to play. We have played a role. France has played a role. A lot of nations have played roles. But the United Nations has done a very good job in Syria -- with Syria in Lebanon of making sure that the world expects the Lebanese elections to be free in May, without Syrian influence. He's an impressive fellow. I applaud him for his hard work.

But there's an example of why I think the United Nations is an important body. On the other hand, the United Nations has had some problems that we've all seen. And if we expect the United Nations to be effective, it needs to clean up its problems. And I think it makes sense to have somebody representing the United Nations who will -- who will be straightforward about the issues.

Stretch. You mind if I call you Stretch in front of --

Q I've been called worse.

THE PRESIDENT: Okay.

Q Getting back to Social Security for a moment, sir, would you consider it a success if Congress were to pass a piece of legislation that dealt with the long-term solvency problem, but did not include personal accounts?

THE PRESIDENT: I feel strongly that there needs to be voluntary personal savings accounts as a part of the

Social Security system. I mean, it's got to be a part of a comprehensive package. The reason I feel strongly about that is that we've got a lot of debt out there, a lot of unfunded liabilities, and our workers need to be able to earn a better rate of return on our money to help deal with that debt.

Secondly, I like the idea of giving someone ownership. I mean, why should ownership be confined only to rich people? Why should people not be allowed to own and manage their own assets who aren't the, you know, the so-called investor class? I think everybody ought to be given that right. As a matter of fact, Congress felt so strongly that people ought to be able to own and manage their own accounts, they set one up for themselves. You've heard me say, I like to say this, if it's good enough for the Congress, it is -- it ought to be good enough for the workers, to give them that option. The government is never saying, you have to set up a personal savings account. We're saying, you ought to have the right to set up a personal saving account so you can earn a better rate of return on your own money than the government can.

And it's that difference between the rate of return, between what the government gets on your money and what a conservative mix of bonds and stocks can get on your money that will make an enormous difference, and a person being able to build his or her own nest egg that the government cannot spend.

Now, it's very important for our fellow citizens to understand there is not a bank account here in Washington, D.C., where we take your payroll taxes and hold it for you and then give it back to you when you retire. Our system here is called pay-as-you-go. You pay into the system through your payroll taxes, and the government spends it. It spends the money on the current retirees, and with the money left over, it funds other government programs. And all that's left behind is file cabinets full of IOUs.

The reason I believe that this ought to work is not only should a worker get a better rate of return, not only should we encourage ownership, but I want people to have real assets in the system. I want people to be able to say, here's my mix of bonds and stocks that I own, and I can leave it to whomever I want. And I hear complaints saying, well, you know, there's going to be high -- Wall Street fees are going to fleece the people. There's ways to have fee structures that are fair. As a matter of fact, all you got to do is go to some of these states where they've got personal accounts available for their workers, and you'll find that the fees will be fair.

People say, well, I don't want to have -- take risks. Well, as I had a line in my opening statement, there are ways where you don't have to take risk. People say, I'm worried about the stock market going down right before I retire. You can manage your assets. You can go from bonds and stocks to only bonds as you get older. In other words, we're giving people flexibility to own their own asset. And I think that's a vital part of making sure America is a hopeful place in the future. So not only will these accounts make the system work better, but the accounts are a better deal. The accounts will mean something for a lot of workers that might not have assets they call their own.

David.

Q Mr. President, in your question -- your answer before about Iraq, you set no benchmarks for us to understand when it is the troops may be able to --

THE PRESIDENT: In Iraq?

Q In Iraq, yes -- about when troops may be able to come back.

THE PRESIDENT: Right.

Q Based on what you've learned now in two years of fighting the insurgency and trying to train the Iraqi security forces, can you say that within the next year you think you could have very substantial American withdrawal of troops?

THE PRESIDENT: David, I know there's a temptation to try to get me to lay out a timetable, and as you know, during the campaign and -- I'll reiterate it -- I don't think it's wise for me to set out a timetable. All that will do is cause an enemy to adjust. So my answer is, as soon as possible. And "as soon as possible" depends upon the Iraqis being able to fight and do the job.

I had a good video conference recently with General Casey and General Petraeus -- General Casey is in charge of the theater; General Petraeus, as you know, is in charge of training -- and they we're upbeat about what they're seeing with the Iraqi troops. One of the questions I like to ask is, are they able to recruit. In other words, you hear -- you see these killers will target recruiting stations, and I've always wondered whether or not that has had an effect on the ability for the Iraqis to draw their fellow citizens into the armed forces. Recruitment is high. It's amazing, isn't it, that people want to serve, they want their country to be free?

The other question that -- one of the other issues that is important is the equipping issue, and the equipment is now moving quite well. In other words, troops are becoming equipped.

Thirdly, a fundamental problem has been whether or not there's an established chain of command, whether or not a civilian government can say to the military, here's what you need to do -- and whether the command goes from top to bottom and the plans get executed. And General Petraeus was telling me he's pleased with the progress being made with setting up a command structure, but there's still more work to be done.

One of the real dangers, David, is that as politics takes hold in Iraq, whether or not the civilian government will keep intact the military structure that we're now helping them develop. And my message to the Prime Minister and our message throughout government to the Iraqis is, keep stability; don't disrupt the training that has gone on -- don't politicize your military -- in other words, have them there to help secure the people.

So we're making good progress. We've reduced our troops from 160,000 more or less to 139,000. As you know, I announced to the country that we would step up our deployments -- step up deployments and retain some troops for the elections. And then I said we'd get them out, and we've done that. In other words, the withdrawals that I said would happen, have happened.

Go ahead; I can see you've got a follow-up right there on the tip of your tongue.

Q Do you feel that the number of troops that you've kept there is limiting your options elsewhere in the world? Just today you had the head of the Defense Intelligence Agency say that he was now concerned that the North Koreans, for example, could put a weapon, a nuclear weapon on a missile that could reach Japan or beyond. Do you feel, as you are confronting these problems, the number of troops you've left tied up in Iraq is limiting your options to go beyond the diplomatic solutions that you described for North Korea and Iran?

THE PRESIDENT: No, I appreciate that question. The person to ask that to, the person I ask that to, at least, is to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, my top military advisor. I say, do you feel that we've limited our capacity to deal with other problems because of our troop levels in Iraq? And the answer is, no, he doesn't feel we're limited. He feels like we've got plenty of capacity.

You mentioned the Korean Peninsula. We've got good capacity in Korea. We traded troops for new equipment, as you know; we brought some troop -- our troop levels down in South Korea, but replaced those troops with more capacity. Let me talk about North Korea, if you don't mind. Is that your question?

Q Go right ahead. (Laughter.)

THE PRESIDENT: I'm surprised you didn't ask it. (Laughter.)

Look, Kim Jong-il is a dangerous person. He's a man who starves his people. He's got huge concentration camps. And, as David accurately noted, there is concern about his capacity to deliver a nuclear weapon. We don't know if he can or not, but I think it's best when you're dealing with a tyrant like Kim Jong-il to assume he can.

That's why I've decided that the best way to deal with this diplomatically is to bring more leverage to the situation by including other countries. It used to be that it was just America dealing with North Korea. And when Kim Jong-il would make a move that would scare people, everybody would say, America, go fix it. I felt it -- it didn't work. In other words, the bilateral approach didn't work. The man said he was going to do something and he didn't do it, for starters.

So I felt a better approach would be to include people in the neighborhood, into a consortium to deal with him.

And it's particularly important to have China involved. China has got a lot of influence in North Korea. We went down to Crawford with Jiang Zemin, and it was there that Jiang Zemin and I issued a statement saying that we would work for a nuclear weapons-free Korean Peninsula.

And so when Kim Jong-il announced the other day about his nuclear intentions and weapons, it certainly caught the attention of the Chinese because they had laid out a policy that was contradicted by Kim Jong-il, and it's helpful to have the Chinese leadership now involved with him. It's more -- it's better to have more than one voice sending the same message to Kim Jong-il. The best way to deal with this issue diplomatically is to have five other -- four other nations beside ourselves dealing with him. And we'll continue to do so.

Finally, as you know, I have instructed Secretary Rumsfeld -- and I work with Congress -- Secretary Rumsfeld has worked with Congress to set up a missile defense system. And we're in the process of getting that missile defense system up and running. One of the reasons why I thought it was important to have a missile defense system is for precisely the reason that you brought up, that perhaps Kim Jong-il has got the capacity to launch a weapon, and wouldn't it be nice to be able to shoot it down. And so we've got a comprehensive strategy in dealing with him.

Ed, yes.

Q Mr. President, good evening.

THE PRESIDENT: Yes.

Q Sir, you've talked all around the country about the poisonous partisan atmosphere here in Washington. I wonder why do you think that is? And do you personally bear any responsibility in having contributed to this atmosphere?

THE PRESIDENT: I'm sure there are some people that don't like me. You know, Ed, I don't know. I've thought long and hard about it. I was -- I've been disappointed. I felt that people could work -- work together in good faith. It's just a lot of politics in the town. It's kind of a zero-sum attitude. We can't -- we can't cooperate with so-and-so because it may make their party look good, and vice-versa.

Although having said that, we did have some success in the education bill. We certainly came together as a country after September the 11th. I appreciate the strong bipartisan support for supporting our troops in harm's way. There's been a lot of instances of bipartisanship, but when you bring a tough issue up like Social Security, it -- sometimes people divide into camps.

I'm proud of my party. Our party has been the party of ideas. We said, here's a problem, and here's some ideas as to how to fix it. And as I've explained to some people, I don't want to politicize this issue -- people say, you didn't need to bring this up, Mr. President, it may cost you politically. I don't think so. I think the American people appreciate somebody bringing up tough issues, particularly when they understand the stakes: the system goes broke in 2041.

In 2027, for those listening, we'll be obligated to pay \$200 billion more dollars a year than we take in, in order to make sure the baby boomers get the benefits they've been promised. In other words, this is a serious problem, and the American people expect us to put our politics aside and get it done.

You know, I can't answer your question as to why. I'll continue to do my best. I've tried to make sure the dialogue is elevated. I don't believe I've resorted to name-calling here in Washington, D.C. I find that to not be productive. But I also understand the mind of the American people. They're wondering what's going on. They're wondering why we can't come together and get an energy bill, for example. They're wondering why we can't get Social Security done. And my pledge to the American people is, I'll continue to work hard to -- with people of both parties and share credit, and give people the benefit of the credit when we get something done.

Yes, sir.

Q Thank you, Mr. President. Just to follow up on Ed's question, we like to remind you that you came to Washington hoping to change the tone, and yet, here we are, three months into your second term and you seem

deadlocked with Democrats on issues like Bolton, DeLay, judges. Is there any danger that the atmosphere is becoming so poisoned, or that you're spending so much political capital that it could imperil your agenda items like Social Security, energy?

THE PRESIDENT: I don't think so, Bill. I think when it's all said and done, we're going to get a lot done. I mean, after all, one of the issues that people have been working on for a long time is class-action lawsuit reform, and I signed that bill. An issue that people have been working on for a long time is bankruptcy law reform, and I signed that bill. And the House got an energy bill out recently, and I talked to Senator Domenici the other day and he's upbeat about getting a bill out pretty quickly and get it to conference and get the issues resolved.

I'm pretty aware of what the issues might be that will hang up a conference, and I think we can get those issues resolved. We're more than willing to help out. So I do believe I'll get an energy bill by August.

There's a budget agreement, and I'm grateful for that. In other words, we are making progress. No question the Social Security issue is a big issue, but it's -- as I said before, we hadn't talked about this issue for 20 years. And they thought we had it fixed 20 years -- 22 years ago, for 75 years, and here we are, 22 years later after the fix, talking about it again. And it's serious business. If you're a grandmother or a grandfather listening, you're going to get your check. But your grandchildren are going to have a heck of a price to bear if we don't get something done now.

You see, it's possible if nothing gets done that the payroll taxes will go up to some 18 percent. Imagine that for your children and grandchildren, living in a society where payroll taxes are up at 18 percent. Or there will be dramatic benefit cuts as time goes on. Now is the time to get it done. And my pledge to the American people is that I'm going to stay on this issue because I know it's important for you.

Fletcher.

Q Yes, Mr. President. You had talked about North Korea and you mentioned that the six-party talks allow you to bring extra leverage to the table. But do you think they're working, given North Korea's continued threats and the continuing growth of their nuclear stockpile?

Q And how long do you let it go before you go to the U.N.?

THE PRESIDENT: No, I appreciate that question. I do think it's making a difference to have China and Japan and South Korea and Russia and the United States working together with North Korea. In my judgment, that's the only way to get this issue solved diplomatically, is to bring more than one party to the table to convince Kim Jong-il to give up his nuclear ambitions. And how far we let it go on is dependent upon our consensus amongst ourselves. Condi, the other day, laid out a potential option of going to the United Nations Security Council. Obviously, that's going to require the parties agreeing. After all, some of the parties in the process have got the capacity to veto a U.N. Security Council resolution.

So this is an issue we need to continue to work with our friends and allies. And the more Kim Jong-il threatens and brags, the more isolated he becomes. And we'll continue to work with China on this issue. I spend a lot of time dealing with Chinese leaders on North Korea, as do people in my administration. And I'll continue to work with our friends in Japan and South Korea. And Vladimir Putin understands the stakes, as well.

Mark.

Q Mr. President, under the law, how would you justify the practice of renditioning, where U.S. agents who brought terror suspects abroad, taking them to a third country for interrogation? And would you stand for it if foreign agents did that to an American here?

THE PRESIDENT: That's a hypothetical, Mark. We operate within the law and we send people to countries where they say they're not going to torture the people.

But let me say something: the United States government has an obligation to protect the American people. It's in our country's interests to find those who would do harm to us and get them out of harm's way. And we will do so

within the law, and we will do so in honoring our commitment not to torture people. And we expect the countries where we send somebody to, not to torture, as well. But you bet, when we find somebody who might do harm to the American people, we will detain them and ask others from their country of origin to detain them. It makes sense. The American people expect us to do that. We -- we still at war.

One of my -- I've said this before to you, I'm going to say it again, one of my concerns after September the 11th is the farther away we got from September the 11th, the more relaxed we would all become and assume that there wasn't an enemy out there ready to hit us. And I just can't let the American people -- I'm not going to let them down by assuming that the enemy is not going to hit us again. We're going to do everything we can to protect us. And we've got guidelines. We've got law. But you bet, Mark, we're going to find people before they harm us.

John McKinnon.

Q Yes, sir. I'd just like to ask, simply, what's your view of the economy right now? First-quarter growth came in weaker than expected, there have been worries about inflation and lower spending by consumers. Are these basically just bumps in the road, in your opinion, or are they reasons for some real concern and could they affect your agenda on Social Security?

THE PRESIDENT: I appreciate that, John. I am concerned about the economy because our small business owners and families are paying higher prices at the gas pump. And that affects the lives of a lot of people. If you're a small business owner and you have to pay higher gas prices and you're -- likely you may not hire a new worker. In other words, higher gas prices, as I have said, is like a tax on the -- on the small business job creators. And it's a tax on families. And I do think this has affected consumer sentiment; I do think it's affected the economy.

On the other hand, the experts tell me that the forecast of economic growth in the coming months looks good. There's more to do to make sure that we don't slip back into slow growth or negative growth. One is to make sure taxes stay low; secondly, is to continue to pursue legal reform. I hope we can get an asbestos reform bill out of both the House and the Senate. There's some positive noises on Capitol Hill as to whether or not we can get an asbestos reform bill. That will be an important reform in order to make sure that our economy continues to grow.

We need to continue to open up markets for U.S. products. As you know, there will be a vote for the Central American Free Trade Agreement here, hopefully soon. I'm a strong believer that that's in the interest of American job creators and workers, that we open up those markets. I know it's important geopolitically to say to those Central American countries, you've got a friend in America. We said we'd have an agreement with you, and it's important to ratify it. It'll help strengthen the neighborhood.

We've also got to make sure that we continue to reduce regulation. I think an important -- I know an important initiative that we're going to be coming forth with here probably in the fall is tax reform. I was amazed by the report the other day that there is some \$330 billion a year that goes unpaid by American taxpayers. It's a phenomenal amount of money. To me, it screams for making the tax system easier to understand, more fair and to make sure that people pay their taxes -- "more fair" means pay what you owe.

And so there are a lot of things we can do, John, to make sure economic growth continues. But I'm an optimistic fellow -- based not upon my own economic forecast -- I'm not an economist -- but based upon the experts that I listen to.

Let's see here. Richard. (Laughter.) There is somebody with a bad throat back there. (Laughter.)

Q Mr. President, you've made No Child Left Behind a big part of your education agenda. The nation's largest teachers union has filed suit against it, saying it's woefully inadequately funded. What's your response to that? And do you think that No Child Left Behind is working?

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, I think it's working. And the reason why I think it's working is because we're measuring, and the measurement is showing progress toward teaching people how to read and write and add and subtract. Listen, the whole theory behind No Child Left Behind is this: if we're going to spend federal money, we expect the states to show us whether or not we're achieving simple objectives -- like literacy, literacy in math, the ability to read and write. And, yes, we're making progress. And I can say that with certainty because we're measuring,

Richard.

Look, I'm a former governor, I believe states ought to control their own destiny when it comes to schools. They are by far the biggest funder of education, and it should remain that way. But we spend a lot of money here at the federal level and have increased the money we spend here quite dramatically at the federal level. And we changed the policy: instead of just spending money and hope for the best, we're now spending money and saying, measure.

And some people don't like to measure. But if you don't measure, how do you know whether or not you've got a problem in a classroom? I believe it's best to measure early and correct problems early, before it's too late. That's why as a part of the No Child Left Behind Act we had money available for remedial education. In other words, we said we're going to measure, and when we detect someone who needs extra help, that person will get extra help.

But, absolutely, it's a good piece of legislation. I will do everything I can to prevent people from unwinding it, by the way.

Q What about the lawsuit? Which —

THE PRESIDENT: Well, I don't know about the lawsuit; I'm not a lawyer. But, you know, I'll ask my lawyers about the lawsuit. But I know some people are trying to unwind No Child Left Behind. I've heard some states say, well, we don't like it. Well, you know, my attitude about not liking it is this: If you teach a child to read and write, it shouldn't bother you whether you measure. That's all we're asking.

The system for too long had just shuffled children through and just hoped for the best. And guess what happened? We had people graduating from high school who were illiterate — and that's just not right in America. It wasn't working. And so I came to Washington and worked with both Republicans and Democrats — this is a case where bipartisanship was really working well. And we said, look, we're going to spend more money at the federal level. But the federal government, what, spends about 7 percent of the total education budgets around the country.

But we said, let's change the attitude. We ought to start with the presumption every child can learn, not just some; and, therefore, if you believe every child can learn, then you ought to expect every classroom to teach. I hear feedback from No Child Left Behind, by the way — and, admittedly, I get the cook's tour, sometimes — but I hear teachers talk to me about how thrilled they are with No Child Left Behind; they appreciate the fact that the system now shows deficiencies early so they can correct those problems. And it is working.

Okay. Mr. Knox.

Q Thank you, Mr. President. I want to make sure I understand your answer to Mike about North Korea. He asked you how long you were prepared to let the multiparty talks proceed, in the face of what might be a gathering threat from North Korea, and you said, how long — I'm paraphrasing — how long we let it go on is dependent on our consensus among ourselves —

THE PRESIDENT: Yes.

Q Did you mean to say that you will neither refer North Korea to the U.N. for sanctions, nor take military action unless you have the agreement of all the other partners abroad?

THE PRESIDENT: No, I didn't speak about military — I'm speaking about diplomatically. And secondly, yes, we've got partners. This is a six-party talk; five of us on the side of convincing Kim Jong-il to get rid of his nuclear weapons, and obviously, Kim Jong-il believes he ought to have some. And my point was that it is best — if you have a group of people trying to achieve the same objective, it's best to work with those people, it's best to consult.

His question was, are you going to — when are you going to — when will there be consequences. And what we want to do is to work with our allies on this issue and develop a consensus, a common approach to the consequences of Kim Jong-il. I mean, it seems counterproductive to have five of us working together, and all of a

sudden, one of us say, well, we're not going to work together.

Again, I repeat to you, our aim is to solve this problem diplomatically. And like I've said before, all options, of course, are on the table, but the best way to solve this problem diplomatically is to work with four other nations who have all agreed in achieving the same goal, and that is a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula.

Final question. Hutch. I don't want to cut into some of these TV shows that are getting ready to air. (Laughter.) For the sake of the economy. (Laughter.)

Q I wanted to ask you about your ideas --

THE PRESIDENT: Is that all right? Go ahead, Hutch. Sorry.

Q I wanted to ask you about your ideas on dealing with Social Security solvency problems. As I understand it -- I know you'll tell me if I'm wrong -- the benefits would be equal to what -- at least equal to what they are today, and then any increase in benefits would be indexed according to income, with lower-income people getting bigger increases. Two things on that: Today's benefits probably won't mean much somewhere down the road; and how far are you going to go with this means-based program? Are you talking about --

THE PRESIDENT: Yes, I appreciate that.

Q -- where a rich person, say, Dick Cheney, wouldn't get much out of it?

THE PRESIDENT: Now, wait a minute, don't get personal here, Hutch. You're on national TV; that's a cheap shot. First of all, in terms of the definition of who would get -- whose benefits would rise faster and whose wouldn't, that's going to be a part of the negotiation process with the United States Congress. There's a -- a Democrat economist had a very -- he put forth this idea and he had a level of -- I think 30 percent of the people would be considered to be in a lower-income scale.

But this is to be negotiated. This is a part of the negotiation process. My job is to lay out an idea that I think will make the system more fair.

And the second question -- or the first question --

Q It's a means-based program where the real wealthy people might not get very much out of it.

THE PRESIDENT: It is -- that's right. I mean, obviously, it is means base when you're talking about lower-income versus wealthier income. The lower-income people's benefits would rise faster. And the whole goal would be to see to it that nobody retired in poverty. Somebody who has worked all their life and paid in the Social Security system would not retire into poverty.

One other point on Social Security that people have got to understand is that it's -- the system of today is not fair for a person whose spouse has died early. In other words, if you're a two-working family like families are here in America, and -- two people working in your family, and the spouse dies early -- before 62, for example -- all of the money that the spouse has put into the system is held there, and then when the other spouse retires, he or she gets to choose the benefits from his or her own work, or the other spouse's benefits, which is ever higher but not both. See what I'm saying? Somebody has worked all their life, the money they put into the system just goes away. It seems unfair to me. I've talked to too many people whose lives were turned upside down when the spouse died early and all they got was a burial benefit.

If you have a personal savings account, a voluntary personal savings account, and your -- and you die early, that's an asset you can leave to your spouse or to your children. That's an important thing for our fellow citizens to understand. The system today is not fair, particularly if the spouse has died early, and this will help remedy that.

Listen, thank you all for your interest. God bless our country.

END 9:01 P.M. EDT

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EXHIBIT K



Remarks Upon Her Departure for Europe

Secretary Condoleezza Rice

As-Aired

Andrews Air Force Base

December 5, 2005



(7:15 a.m. EST)

Good morning. We have received inquiries from the European Union, the Council of Europe, and from several individual countries about media reports concerning U.S. conduct in the war on terror. I am going to respond now to those inquiries, as I depart today for Europe. And this will also essentially form the text of the letter that I will send to Secretary Straw, who wrote on behalf of the European Union as the European Union President.



The United States and many other countries are waging a war against terrorism. For our country this war often takes the form of conventional military operations in places like Afghanistan and Iraq. Sometimes this is a political struggle, a war of ideas. It is a struggle waged also by our law enforcement agencies. Often we engage the enemy through the cooperation of our intelligence services with their foreign counterparts.

We must track down terrorists who seek refuge in areas where governments cannot take effective action, including where the terrorists cannot in practice be reached by the ordinary processes of law. In such places terrorists have planned the killings of thousands of innocents – in New York City or Nairobi, in Bali or London, in Madrid or Beslan, in Casablanca or Istanbul. Just two weeks ago I also visited a hotel ballroom in Amman, viewing the silent, shattered aftermath of one of those attacks.

The United States, and those countries that share the commitment to defend their citizens, will use every lawful weapon to defeat these terrorists. Protecting citizens is the first and oldest duty of any government. Sometimes these efforts are misunderstood. I want to help all of you understand the hard choices involved, and some of the responsibilities that go with them.

One of the difficult issues in this new kind of conflict is what to do with captured individuals who we know or believe to be terrorists. The individuals come from many countries and are often captured far from their original homes. Among them are those who are effectively stateless, owing allegiance only to the extremist cause of transnational terrorism. Many are extremely dangerous. And some have information that may save lives, perhaps even thousands of lives.

The captured terrorists of the 21st century do not fit easily into traditional systems of criminal or military justice, which were designed for different needs. We have to adapt. Other governments are now also facing this challenge.

We consider the captured members of al-Qaida and its affiliates to be unlawful combatants who may be held, in accordance with the law of war, to keep them from killing innocents. We must treat them in accordance with our laws, which reflect the values of the American people. We must question them to gather potentially significant, life-saving, intelligence. We must bring terrorists to justice wherever possible.

For decades, the United States and other countries have used "renditions" to transport terrorist suspects from the country where they were captured to their home country or to other countries where they can be questioned, held, or brought to justice.

In some situations a terrorist suspect can be extradited according to traditional judicial procedures. But there have long

been many other cases where, for some reason, the local government cannot detain or prosecute a suspect, and traditional extradition is not a good option. In those cases the local government can make the sovereign choice to cooperate in a rendition. Such renditions are permissible under international law and are consistent with the responsibilities of those governments to protect their citizens.

Rendition is a vital tool in combating transnational terrorism. Its use is not unique to the United States, or to the current administration. Last year, then Director of Central Intelligence George Tenet recalled that our earlier counterterrorism successes included "the rendition of many dozens of terrorists prior to September 11, 2001."

– Ramzi Youssef masterminded the 1993 bombing of the World Trade Center and plotted to blow up airlines over the Pacific Ocean, killing a Japanese airline passenger in a test of one of his bombs. Once tracked down, a rendition brought him to the United States, where he now serves a life sentence.

– One of history's most infamous terrorists, best known as "Carlos the Jackal," had participated in murders in Europe and the Middle East. He was finally captured in Sudan in 1994. A rendition by the French government brought him to justice in France, where he is now imprisoned. Indeed, the European Commission of Human Rights rejected Carlos' claim that his rendition from Sudan was unlawful.

Renditions take terrorists out of action, and save lives.

In conducting such renditions, it is the policy of the United States, and I presume of any other democracies who use this procedure, to comply with its laws and comply with its treaty obligations, including those under the Convention Against Torture. Torture is a term that is defined by law. We rely on our law to govern our operations. The United States does not permit, tolerate, or condone torture under any circumstances. Moreover, in accordance with the policy of this administration:

– The United States has respected – and will continue to respect – the sovereignty of other countries.

– The United States does not transport, and has not transported, detainees from one country to another for the purpose of interrogation using torture.

– The United States does not use the airspace or the airports of any country for the purpose of transporting a detainee to a country where he or she will be tortured.

– The United States has not transported anyone, and will not transport anyone, to a country when we believe he will be tortured. Where appropriate, the United States seeks assurances that transferred persons will not be tortured.

International law allows a state to detain enemy combatants for the duration of hostilities. Detainees may only be held for an extended period if the intelligence or other evidence against them has been carefully evaluated and supports a determination that detention is lawful. The U.S. does not seek to hold anyone for a period beyond what is necessary to evaluate the intelligence or other evidence against them, prevent further acts of terrorism, or hold them for legal proceedings.

With respect to detainees, the United States Government complies with its Constitution, its laws, and its treaty obligations. Acts of physical or mental torture are expressly prohibited. The United States Government does not authorize or condone torture of detainees. Torture, and conspiracy to commit torture, are crimes under U.S. law, wherever they may occur in the world.

Violations of these and other detention standards have been investigated and punished. There have been cases of unlawful treatment of detainees, such as the abuse of a detainee by an intelligence agency contractor in Afghanistan or the horrible mistreatment of some prisoners at Abu Ghraib that sickened us all and which arose under the different legal framework that applies to armed conflict in Iraq. In such cases the United States has vigorously investigated, and where appropriate, prosecuted and punished those responsible. Some individuals have already been sentenced to lengthy terms in prison; others have been demoted or reprimanded.

As CIA Director Goss recently stated, our intelligence agencies have handled the gathering of intelligence from a very small number of extremely dangerous detainees, including the individuals who planned the 9/11 attacks in the United States, the attack on the U.S.S. Cole, and many other murders and attempted murders. It is the policy of the United States that this questioning is to be conducted within U.S. law and treaty obligations, without using torture. It is also U.S. policy that authorized interrogation will be consistent with U.S. obligations under the Convention Against Torture, which prohibit cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment. The intelligence so gathered has stopped terrorist attacks and saved innocent

lives – in Europe as well as in the United States and other countries. The United States has fully respected the sovereignty of other countries that cooperate in these matters.

Because this war on terrorism challenges traditional norms and precedents of previous conflicts, our citizens have been discussing and debating the proper legal standards that should apply. President Bush is working with the U.S. Congress to come up with good solutions. I want to emphasize a few key points.

– The United States is a country of laws. My colleagues and I have sworn to support and defend the Constitution of the United States. We believe in the rule of law.

-- The United States Government must protect its citizens. We and our friends around the world have the responsibility to work together in finding practical ways to defend ourselves against ruthless enemies. And these terrorists are some of the most ruthless enemies we face.

-- We cannot discuss information that would compromise the success of intelligence, law enforcement, and military operations. We expect that other nations share this view.

Some governments choose to cooperate with the United States in intelligence, law enforcement, or military matters. That cooperation is a two-way street. We share intelligence that has helped protect European countries from attack, helping save European lives.

It is up to those governments and their citizens to decide if they wish to work with us to prevent terrorist attacks against their own country or other countries, and decide how much sensitive information they can make public. They have a sovereign right to make that choice.

Debate in and among democracies is natural and healthy. I hope that that debate also includes a healthy regard for the responsibilities of governments to protect their citizens.

Four years after September 11, most of our populations are asking us if we are doing all that we can to protect them. I know what it is like to face an inquiry into whether everything was done that could have been done. So now, before the next attack, we should all consider the hard choices that democratic governments must face. And we can all best meet this danger if we work together.

Thank you.
2005/1130 (FINAL)

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EXHIBIT L



THE WHITE HOUSE
PRESIDENT
GEORGE W. BUSH

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For Immediate Release
Office of the Press Secretary
December 6, 2005

Press Briefing by Scott McClellan

James S. Brady Briefing Room

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Press Briefing

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12:40 P.M. EST

MR. McCLELLAN: Good afternoon, everyone. I want to begin with two things. First of all, the President yesterday spoke about the underlying **strength of our economy**, which is powered by our American workers and their ingenuity and hard work and know-how. Our economy is growing stronger and creating more jobs each day. Two-hundred-and-fifteen-thousand jobs were created in November. Nearly 4.5 million jobs have been created since May of 2003. The third-quarter GDP growth was at 4.3 percent. Consumer confidence and business investment are up. There are a lot of good signs about our economy.

Today we received more proof that our economy is very healthy, as we learned that productivity growth was up 4.7 percent in the third quarter. This represents the fastest productivity growth over a five-year period since World War II. And it's important to look at what this means for working families. More often than not, they mean -- higher productivity growth means higher wages, something that the President is very focused on.

The reason we are encouraged and optimistic about this productivity is that higher wages for American workers would be expected to be soon to follow. What happened in the late 1990s and throughout our history is exactly that. The other factor that typically leads to higher wages is a strong job market. And we certainly have that in place right now. So we're confident about the direction of our economy. And I just wanted to draw that to -- that new information to your attention.

Secondly, let me talk about tomorrow's remarks on the war on terrorism, and our plan for victory in Iraq. The President will be speaking before the Council on Foreign Relations and talking about our plan for victory. This is the second in a series of speeches leading up to the December 15th elections in Iraq. Each of these speeches has some common themes about our strategy for success. The terrorists have made clear that Iraq is a central front in the war on terrorism. It is critical that we defeat the terrorists and prevail in Iraq. That is critical to winning the war on terrorism.

And during this time of war, the President believes it's important to talk to the American people about the different aspects of that strategy. Like I said, there's some common themes -- the importance of winning, the stakes that

are involved and why it's so important that we succeed in Iraq, to our efforts to spread democracy in the broader Middle East and change the status quo in the Middle East and how that will help lay the foundations of peace.

And so I expect he'll talk about the nature of the enemy that we're facing, the stakes involved, and how we define victory and how we achieve it. There are three elements to this comprehensive strategy that he talked about last week. They are all integrated. As we move forward on one, that helps us move forward on the other. Those three tracks are the security front, which the President talked in great detail about last week at the Naval Academy. The Iraqi security forces are more and more taking the lead in the fight, and they're controlling more territory of Iraq.

There's the political front. The Iraqi people have shown time and again that they are going to defy the terrorists and build a free and peaceful future. And it's important that we help the Iraqi people put in place an inclusive democracy based on institutions that protect the interests of all, and that's what we're working to do.

Then there's the economic side, and we are working to help the Iraqi people rebuild their infrastructure, reform their economy and build prosperity to give all Iraqis a stake in their future that is based on freedom and peace.

So tomorrow the President will talk in greater detail about our approach for helping the Iraqi people with economic reform and reconstruction. And he will talk about how we have adapted to circumstances and challenges on the ground when it comes to the economic front. The Iraqi people are making steady progress. And he'll talk about some of the examples of success, about how our approach is working and how that approach is working in some areas -- important areas of Iraq. As the security is improved in those areas, we've been able to move ahead to help the Iraqi people on the reconstruction.

There have been challenges that we have had to learn from. We are learning from our experience. And much like on the security front, our approach has changed and improved over time. We are helping local Iraqi leaders and security forces overcome those challenges, and they are making some important gains in their future.

And the President will also talk about some specific concerns that still need to be addressed, as well. So that's kind of a general overview of his remarks tomorrow, and you will hear the rest from him.

And with that, I'll be glad to go to your questions.

Q So you're saying it will basically be on **Iraq's economic progress?**

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, he'll talk about all three tracks in our comprehensive strategy for victory, like I said, and he'll reiterate some of the themes that he will be talking about in each of the remarks. But tomorrow will be focused in greater detail on the economic side.

Q The President spoke at Annapolis last week; the Vice President at Fort Drum today. Who do you expect will be in the audience tomorrow? And how has the White House -- if at all -- shaped who will be there?

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, this is the Council on Foreign Relations, and so it will be members of the Council on Foreign Relations. It is an independent, non-partisan organization that is widely respected.

Q And so they handled all the invitations?

MR. McCLELLAN: I don't know if we had some, but it's --their organization is hosting this event.

Go ahead, Goyal.

Q Scott, just came back from the **earthquake area up in Pakistan and India**. A lot of dollar amount is coming from the East and West, including from the United States, but people are saying really not reaching enough to them for what it should be. And another thing is that, as far as India is concerned, the major topic --

MR. McCLELLAN: You're talking about earthquake aid for Pakistan?

Q And India, right. And Pakistan, yes. And another topic, in India, today on the -- the topic, is that winning war on terrorism, and most Indians support President Bush as the war on terrorism is concerned. But recently last week, an Indian worker in Afghanistan was brutally beheaded by the al Qaeda terrorists. What they are saying is, really, where the Indians stand as far as support for the U.S. war on terrorism is concerned? What President Bush has to say and --

MR. McCLELLAN: Two things. Let me take the first part of your question. First of all, I think that the people in the region are seeing the true generosity and compassion of the American people. They're seeing that through the example of aid workers, through non-governmental organizations. They're seeing that through the example of our military that has provided substantial help to people, particularly in the hardest hit areas of Pakistan, providing important equipment and resources to help get people out of harm's way and to help provide much needed relief to those people.

Remember, the President just recently announced that a number of leaders from the private sector are heading up a private relief effort to provide additional funding to those organizations that are on the ground, organizations that have a proven track record of helping people in need. And certainly, India has a lot of capability to respond to the needs of their people, but we always stand ready to assist India in any way possible, as well. And so we look forward to continuing to work with both those countries to help in any way that we can. And that's what we are committed to doing.

In terms of the war on terrorism, we have a very close partner in both those countries as we move forward to winning the war on terrorism. Both those countries are committed to doing all they can to protect their citizens from the threat of terrorism, and they are taking steps to address those threats, and we are working very closely with them. And it's important that we also continue to share intelligence and cooperate in many ways to address those threats.

Q Is President Bush going to talk about --

MR. McCLELLAN: Let me keep -- let me keep going.

Q About one thing --

MR. McCLELLAN: I'm sorry?

Q Is President going to talk about, in tomorrow's speech, as far as Afghanistan and al Qaeda --

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, tomorrow is focused really on Iraq and our plan for victory there.

Go ahead, Elaine.

Q Yesterday, **Secretary Rumsfeld**, in his speech, criticized the media. I'll read his quote. "We've arrived at a strange time in this country, where the worst about America and our military seems to go -- seems to so quickly be taken as truth by the press, and reported and spread around the world, often with little context and little scrutiny, let alone direction or accountability after the fact." Does the President, as Commander-in-Chief, share Secretary Rumsfeld's feelings?

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, the Secretary is a pretty plain-spoken kind of guy, and I think he calls it like he sees them. And I think that's what he was doing yesterday. I think you've heard the President's comments, and he's talked about the real progress we're making. Sometimes there's important developments on the ground that don't necessarily make the headlines, and it's important to talk about the real progress that we're making and look at the gains that are being made on the ground. Because we're going to win in Iraq -- the President talked about that earlier -- he knows we will win; we have a very clear strategy for defeating the terrorists and for helping the Iraqi people build a free and peaceful future; and we will succeed and our troops will succeed, and they have our full support in doing that. And it's important to take into account the good progress that's being made on the ground.

Q Does the President feel that -- the same way the Secretary does,,in that the media has not done a good job in portraying --

MR. McCLELLAN: I think what I will continue to do is reiterate what the President has been saying. He's been talking about the real progress that's being made on the ground. I indicated my response to your question about Secretary Rumsfeld.

Q Back in March, the President said, when asked about rendition, "We seek assurances that nobody will be tortured when we render a person back to their home country." Today he said, "We do not render to countries that torture." That sounds like a change.

MR. McCLELLAN: No, I think he was referring to what we have previously said, which was, we have an obligation not to render people to countries if we believe they're going to be tortured. And in some instances we seek further assurances to make sure that people won't be tortured.

The United States of America is strongly committed to upholding our values and our laws and our treaty obligations, and that's what the President was talking about.

Q So there's no change --

MR. McCLELLAN: No, he's referring to --

Q -- even though he's said, we don't render to countries that torture? In other words, if you don't get assurances, they won't -- you won't send us --

MR. McCLELLAN: Yes, he's referring to what we previously have said, that we have an obligation not to do so.

Q On the same subject, Scott. When you do -- **when renditions do take place**, are there procedures in place to make sure that the United States, on a regular basis, monitors the conditions of the prisoners and the way they are interrogated on a daily basis, or so forth? And, if not, are such conditions now being put in place at White House instigation or the instigation of others?

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, a couple of things. One, Secretary Rice spoke at length in response to some questions that had been raised by the European Union, in response to a letter --

Q She didn't address this issue --

MR. McCLELLAN: -- response to a letter from Secretary Snow. And we make sure that we have assurances that people won't be tortured if -- or before we render them to a country. That's something that we place high priority on.

Now, this is about protecting our citizens. And all countries have an obligation to work together to do everything we can within the law to ensure the safety and security of our people. This is a global war on terrorism, and we work cooperatively with many nations. And we respect the sovereignty of each nation. And we have and we will continue to do so. It is their choice as to how they want to -- it is their choice in terms of how they want to participate. But in terms of renditions and talking in any specific way about it, I'm just not going to do it. I'm not going to get into talking about these issues because it could compromise things in an ongoing war on terrorism. And we're not going to do that.

Q Scott, one follow-up on that: Why not take them back to U.S. soil if you are concerned that they not be tortured, where you are under clear guidelines both of U.S. law and, of course, the whole torture issues that you raised. Why move them around to foreign countries --

MR. McCLELLAN: A couple of things. Renditions have been in place for a long time.

Q Yes.

MR. McCLELLAN: Secretary Rice talked yesterday about the Jackal and others that have been rendered previously and brought to justice, and the importance of rendition as a tool that will -- can help us prevail in the

war on terrorism. And she made very clear that we are going to do everything lawful within our means to protect our citizens. And we have to recognize --

Q Render them back here?

MR. McCLELLAN: Hang on, no, hang on, I'm coming to your question. We are in a different kind of war against a different kind of enemy. This is an enemy that has no regard for innocent human life. They don't wear uniforms. They don't report to a particular state or nation. They espouse an ideology that they seek to spread throughout the world. It's a hateful and oppressive ideology.

Now, in terms -- you jumped in there a second ago, so I forgot the first part of your question I was coming to.

Q Why not -- why not render them back to the United States where there is --

MR. McCLELLAN: Response to that -- the way I would say -- respond to that is that we make decisions on a case-by-case basis, working with other countries, in terms of where individuals are rendered.

Q What is the purpose of rendition, other than, if it is not, in fact, to subject detainees to a degree of interrogation somewhat more difficult than that which they would be subjected to in the United States? And that being the case, what definition of torture does the United States understand and accept?

MR. McCLELLAN: The ones that are defined in our law and our international treaty obligations. We have laws --

Q If that's the case, then why bother to render anybody?

MR. McCLELLAN: We have laws that prohibit torture. We have treaty obligations that we adhere to. And the Convention Against Torture is a treaty obligation that we take seriously and we adhere to. And in that treaty, it -- those treaties and laws, it defines torture. And --

Q Then what's the purpose of rendition?

MR. McCLELLAN: -- so we adhere to our laws and our treaty obligations, and our values. That's very important as we move forward in conducting the war on terrorism.

But what this is about is how we conduct the war on terrorism, how we protect our people, our citizens. And each country's highest responsibility is the safety and security of their citizens. And we all must work together to prevail in this different kind of war. And intelligence helps save lives. And we have an obligation when people are picked up on the battlefield -- unlawful enemy combatants -- to do our part to question them and learn information that can help us prevent attacks from happening in the first place. And we work very closely with countries throughout the world to make sure that we are doing all we can to protect our citizens -- but we do so in a lawful way.

Q But if we are committed to international conventions against torture, what, then, is the purpose of rendition?

MR. McCLELLAN: Again, I'm not going to get into talking about specific intelligence matters that help prevent attacks from happening and help save lives. As Secretary Rice indicated yesterday, the steps we have taken have helped save lives in America and in European countries. We will continue to work with --

Q But you seem to be suggesting that --

MR. McCLELLAN: No, you're --

Q -- there's more to be gained by interrogating these people outside the United States than there is inside.

MR. McCLELLAN: It depends. It's a case-by-case basis, Bill, and in some cases they're rendered to their home country of origin. You cited two examples of past renditions yesterday, one individual that was involved in the attack on the World Trade Center in 1993; another individual that is one of the most notorious terrorists of all time.

Q But how do we know they weren't tortured? They claim they were.

MR. McCLELLAN: I'm sorry?

Q How do we know they weren't tortured?

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, we know that our enemy likes to make claims like that.

Q I want to go back to David's question about whether or not the administration is looking into any new ways of monitoring rendition activities in other countries that --

MR. McCLELLAN: I answered his question and I'm not going to --

Q You didn't answer that question, Scott.

MR. McCLELLAN: I'm not going to talk any further about it.

Q You didn't say anything about whether or not -- you said we receive assurances from other countries. You never did say anything about whether or not we, then, go further and make sure that nothing is occurring. Is the White House --

MR. McCLELLAN: Secretary Rice talked about it yesterday. And I talked about it today. And we're not going to comment further than that when it comes to intelligence matters that are helping us to prevent attacks from happening and helping us to learn important intelligence that saves lives.

Q So there's no monitoring -- so there's no mechanisms, no monitoring after --

MR. McCLELLAN: You're asking me to talk about intelligence matters that I'm just not --

Q We're not asking you to talk -- we're asking you whether there's a procedure in place --

Q To make sure --

MR. McCLELLAN: You've had your question, I've responded to it and this what I'm going to say.

Q I had my question; you haven't responded to it.

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, I've told you why. I have responded to it and I've told you the reason why. And I think the American people understand the importance of protecting sources and methods and not compromising ongoing efforts in the war on terrorism, and that's why I'm just not going to talk about it further.

Q I'm not asking you about an individual case. We're asking whether there is a procedure in the U.S. government to make sure that the system you tell us will not result in torture, in fact, doesn't.

MR. McCLELLAN: A couple of things. One, again, I'm not going to talk further about intelligence matters of this nature. So let me make that clear, again.

Q We're not asking on an intelligence matter.

MR. McCLELLAN: No, this is relating to intelligence matters; it absolutely is, David. And because of the nature of the enemy we face and the different kind of war that we're engaged in, these are matters I think the American people can understand that we're not going to talk further about because of the sensitivity and because of the fact that they could compromise our ongoing efforts.

We need to prevail in this war on terrorism. We've got to do everything we can within the law to protect our

citizens, and we need to work with other countries to help save lives, and that's what we're doing.

Q The question you're currently evading is not about an intelligence matter.

MR. McCLELLAN: You've had my response, Bill.

Go ahead.

Q Scott –

MR. McCLELLAN: It is relating to intelligence. Go ahead.

Q If the countries to which we are rendering detainees are not torturing, are we to conclude that they have some technique that is, in fact, more successful in gaining intelligence than the United States?

MR. McCLELLAN: No, I didn't say anything -- I didn't say anything to suggest that.

Q A separate issue, then, if I may.

MR. McCLELLAN: Sure. I would encourage each of you to look closely at what Secretary Rice said yesterday, because she addressed this in detail.

Q For months, discussions of a potential U.S. withdrawal were met, in this briefing room and by the administration, by a suggestion that that would send the wrong message to the troops, to the Iraqis, to the terrorists, to the world. In the last month or so, in the 35-page document last week, and your own comments, et cetera, we're now told that there -- that the administration fully expects a **conditions-based withdrawal** potentially to start next year. And today, the Vice President said that going forward we'll have fewer nationwide operations and more specialized operations against the terrorists, we'll move out of Iraqi cities, reduce the number of bases, and conduct fewer patrols and convoys. Does that not telegraph to the enemy our intentions and allow them to plan for it tactically?

MR. McCLELLAN: No, the President talked about that very issue last week in his remarks at the Naval Academy.

Q Scott, Congressman William Delahunt of Massachusetts has entered into a deal with **Hugo Chavez of Venezuela** to provide low-cost heating fuel, and apparently the State Department is furious about this, and there may be another deal in the works with the Bronx in New York. Why is -- why are not American oil companies like ExxonMobile stepping in to say, Mr. Chavez, we've just had a huge windfall profit in the last quarter; turn your tankers around, we'll take care of our own in this country. And since there was just a hearing up on Capitol Hill to discuss the windfall profits, why isn't there pressure –

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, I think – I think the State Department has spoken out about this specific issue when it comes to Venezuela, and they've talked about that. I really don't have anything further to add to what they've already said.

In terms of oil companies here in America, we've made very clear what our views are, and that all of us have a role to do to help address high energy prices. And we are taking action to do so. This is an important need that we need to address for the American people. High energy costs harm our economy. Our economy is strong and continuing to grow stronger. And the President yesterday spoke at length in his remarks about how that we have this foundation for growth in place, we need to continue to act on pro-growth policies to help better the lives of our workers and our families. And that's what we're doing. We passed a comprehensive energy strategy. Now we need to move forward to expand refining capacity and take additional steps. And that's what we will continue to do.

Q Scott, last week the NEC director said that the White House absolutely supports the Katrina tax relief bill. But I was wondering why the White House supports **across-the-board tax relief** which would extend to certain establishments like casinos – which they said they're going to rebuild anyway – and certain other establishments, like massage parlors and liquor stores?

MR. McCLELLAN: I think for the reasons we've stated previously, Paula. I think you've asked this question of me -- or someone else in this room has -- and I've responded to it. We don't believe you can be selective when it comes to addressing the economic needs of the region. It should apply equally and fairly to all those businesses.

Q I thought the White House, in principle, is opposed to targeted tax relief.

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, we've talked about the importance of providing tax relief to all Americans. And, yes, we have talked about that specific issue. That's why we've provided tax relief to all those who pay federal income taxes. And the last thing we need to do right now is raise taxes -- that would be a significant impact on those who are recovering in the region and it would be a significant impact on the pocketbooks of the American people.

We need to make the tax relief that we've put in place permanent; we also need to continue to take steps to help people in the region as they're rebuilding their communities and rebuilding their lives. That's what we're doing; we're working with Congress to meet their needs. We've already provided some \$60 billion in assistance to the region; \$17 billion of that we're working to reallocate to recovery and reconstruction needs in the deficit reduction package efforts. And we're working with Congress to make sure that people have their needs met.

Q Also, do you think there should be greater Medicaid rebates by drug manufacturers so that you don't have to cut so much on low-income --

MR. McCLELLAN: We believe that we need to move forward on Medicare reform and modernize Medicare and to close loopholes. And we can find savings and slow the growth in Medicare by addressing those important needs. And I think that's what the American people want us to do -- to make sure that people who need the help are getting the help, and to take steps to restrain spending.

Q Scott, you very graciously answered seven questions from two reporters, and I have a mere three-part question. First, at the National Christmas Tree lighting last week the President said, "Each year we gather here to celebrate the season of hope and joy, and to remember the story of one humble life that lifted the sights of humanity. Santa, thanks for coming." And the question: Will the President apologize to Christians offended by his referring to Jesus as Santa?

MR. McCLELLAN: The President meant exactly what he said, Les.

Q Second, does the President know of any way that the passport of Ramsey Clark could be revoked on grounds of his consistent actions against the United States?

MR. McCLELLAN: Look, there are procedures in place for all American citizens when it comes to those issues, and we expect those procedures to be followed for all Americans.

Q When defendants in --

MR. McCLELLAN: One more.

Q Yes, one more. When defendants in criminal cases in the United States have shouted or otherwise disrupted the court, haven't there been cases where they have been bound and gagged in court? And would the President recommend this for Saddam Hussein?

MR. McCLELLAN: It's up to the Iraqi people to hold Saddam Hussein to account. There is an Iraqi court, led by Iraqis. It is a special tribunal that was set up to hold Saddam Hussein and his regime leaders to account for the atrocities they committed. This was a brutal regime that was engaged in systematic torture. They had rape rooms and torture chambers. And we are hearing eyewitness accounts of the kind of brutality that this regime was engaged in. When you have an eyewitness talking about human blood being in a meat grinder, and talking about electric shocks, you see the true nature of this regime. And the court that is in place today shows the change that is coming to Iraq. This is an important step in building a democratic future for Iraq, based on the rule of law. The Iraqi people are the ones that will hold Saddam Hussein to account for the atrocities he committed against the Iraqi people, and the crimes he committed against humanity.

Q Thank you.

Q Scott, it was two years ago today that the administration fired Secretary O'Neill and Mr. Lindsey and overhauled his **economic team** ahead of the -- ahead of an election year. Given the fact that the President feels the -- feels it's necessary to promote the economy now, does that suggest that he doesn't have confidence in his current team to communicate that message?

MR. McCLELLAN: Our economic team is doing a great job helping to build on the foundation for growth that we have in place. He has a great team: Secretary Snow; Secretary Gutierrez; Secretary Chao; Al Hubbard, our Director of the National Economic Council; Ben Bernanke is leaving as Chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers to move on to the Federal Reserve. And we will move forward on replacing that position as quickly as we can when he is in place.

But we have an economic team that is doing a great job on behalf of the American people, and helping us to put in place the kind of pro-growth policies needed to continue creating jobs and creating an environment for future growth.

Go ahead.

Q In the **Vice President's speech** this morning, he said -- and this was in the context of the war in Iraq -- he said, "We weren't in Iraq on September the 11th, and the terrorists hit us anyway." Why does the Vice President continue to give the impression that Saddam Hussein's Iraq was connected with the September the 11th attacks, when the President has conceded that they were not, and the 9/11 Commission conceded they were not?

MR. McCLELLAN: I don't think that does. I don't think that does. But I think what you have to understand about September 11th is that September 11th taught us some important lessons: one, that we need to take the fight to the enemy and engage them abroad to prevent attacks from happening here at home -- that's the best way we can protect the American people. And two, to address the root causes that lead to people flying planes into buildings or strapping on bombs and blowing themselves up and killing innocent men, women, and children. And that means spreading freedom in the broader Middle East and changing the status quo.

The Middle East had become a dangerous breeding ground for terrorism, and what we're working to do is bring some hope and opportunity to the region. Iraq will inspire the rest of the Middle East by its example of building a free and democratic future for its people, and help encourage those who, around the Middle East and beyond, want to live in freedom. So I think that you have a misunderstanding of what he said.

Q "We weren't in Iraq on September 11th and the terrorists hit us anyway." Would you not agree that there's some linkage there?

MR. McCLELLAN: No, I think he's making the point that the President made last week, that those who suggest that if we weren't in Iraq, that the terrorists would just be idle. That's an absurd allegation, because the terrorists are determined to spread their fear and chaos and violence throughout the civilized world. They attacked us well before we were in Iraq; they attacked other countries well before any decisions were made to go into Iraq.

Q The Vice President --

MR. McCLELLAN: They continue to try to carry out the attacks. That's why it's so important that we're engaging the enemy in Iraq, that we're taking the fight to them there. And all you have to do is look back at the letter from Zawahiri to Zarqawi to see the nature of the enemy that we face and what they recognize is involved in Iraq, because they have said themselves that when we succeed in Iraq, it will be a major blow to their ambitions. And that's why we are going to continue to move forward toward victory, because it is critical to prevailing in the broader war on terrorism.

Q Does the Vice President now agree that Saddam Hussein's arrest was not involved in September 11th?

MR. McCLELLAN: Those questions have been gone over ad nauseam in the past. Thanks.

Q Scott, how long will it take for Iraq to achieve the level of economic stability where the U.S. will not have to be in there propping it up?

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, first of all, what we are there doing is helping the Iraqi people reform their economic institutions and move forward on reconstruction. The President spelled out in the plan for victory that we released last week for the American people the progress that we're making on the different fronts, including the economic front, and the challenges that lie ahead.

And the President, again, will talk about what **our definition of victory in Iraq** is tomorrow, and that is putting in place an Iraq that is not a safe haven for terrorists to plan and plot their attacks. That's very important for people to understand, because the terrorists want to try to create a safe haven in Iraq from which they can plan and plot attacks and spread their fear and chaos throughout the broader Middle East and attack -- or take over other parts of the Middle East. That was spelled out in the letter from Zawahiri to Zarqawi.

But victory is defined as making sure that terrorists and Saddam loyalists can no longer threaten Iraq's democracy, making sure that Iraqi security forces can defend and protect their own citizens, and making sure that Iraq is not a safe haven for terrorists to plan and plot attacks.

In terms of the progress that's being made on the economic front, I encourage you to listen closely to the President's remarks. I mean, he's going to talk about the challenges that remain and how we've really worked to adapt and change to the circumstances on the ground. But there's important success being made when it comes to the economic front. And he'll highlight some of that.

Q Does the administration have any feel, any sense --

MR. McCLELLAN: If you're trying to put some arbitrary sort of timetable on things, the President has talked about that.

Q Well, he's talked about that **in terms of troops**, but I'm asking in terms of tomorrow's topic, is there any feel at all for how long it will take to achieve these reforms that you just mentioned to achieve the kind of economic stability that this country will be able to stand on its own feet?

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, each front is -- this is an integrated approach. Go back to what I said at the beginning. The security front, the economic front, and the political front all affect one another. And as we move forward on each, it helps us move forward on the other. And that's why it's important we focus on these three areas. That's makes up the comprehensive strategy for victory that the President has in place. And we need to continue to help support the Iraqi people as they build their security forces. We need to continue to help the Iraqi people as they reconstruct their country and put in place economic reforms that will lead to prosperity for the Iraqi -- for all Iraqis.

Remember, Iraq has a lot of potential when it comes to their economic future. But this was a country that for three decades was led by a brutal dictator who was more intent on putting that great wealth to the betterment of the few in power than the betterment of the people, and neglected the infrastructure and neglected the economy of that country. And so it takes time to rebuild from that.

And the international community has a responsibility. You make it sound like it's just the United States. All of us have a responsibility to help the Iraqi people as they move forward on putting in place the market reforms and establishing the institutions for democracy to succeed.

Go ahead.

Q Mr. McClellan, you mentioned a couple of times today our efforts to -- continuing efforts to spread democracy --

MR. McCLELLAN: I was calling on him, but go ahead.

Q All right, well, just to be clear about something, we didn't go to Iraq to spread democracy, did we? I mean, we didn't go to Iraq to help the Iraqi people. It was initially a security issue -- just to be clear on that.

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, we spelled out the reasons we went to Iraq, and I would encourage you to go back and look at that. We have liberated 25 million people in Iraq, and 25 million people in Afghanistan. And spreading --

Q But it wasn't the reason we went --

MR. McCLELLAN: -- spreading freedom and democracy -- well, we're not going to re-litigate the reasons why we went into Iraq. We've made very clear what the reasons were. And, no, I don't think you define them accurately by being so selective in the question.

In terms of the lessons of September 11th, again, let me reiterate what those were -- that we need to address the underlying causes that lead people to hijack airplanes and fly them into buildings, or that lead people to strap on bombs and blow themselves up. And that's what we're doing by spreading freedom in the broader Middle East. And there are different ways we can support those efforts.

The Middle East peace process -- the President has been providing a lot of strong support for the Israeli people and the Palestinian people as they move forward on the Middle East peace process. That's important for spreading hope and opportunity in the broader Middle East. We are continuing to support the people of Afghanistan as they move forward. And we'll continue to support and help the Iraqi people as they move forward, too.

Q But just to be clear, that's a different argument than was made to the American people before the war --

MR. McCLELLAN: Our arguments are very public. You can go and look at what the arguments were. That's not what I was talking about.

Go ahead.

Q In terms of the economic development of Iraq, does this mean the President is committed to a long-term post-war economic Marshal Plan over there to try to establish --

MR. McCLELLAN: Well, the international community is providing help. Remember, Iraq is moving forward on debt relief, and the international community has stepped forward. The international community has stepped forward with some significant contributions, in terms of helping Iraq with reconstruction.

Iraq has a lot of vast resources that they can help -- that they can put towards rebuilding the infrastructure and helping with their long-term economic needs, as well. And the President will talk about that in his remarks, too.

Go ahead.

Q I'm thinking -- I'm thinking, really, about the Bosnia experience. We have now pulled out of Bosnia, but it still has not been reconstructed economically. And I just wondered whether we would -- if this is another 10- or 15-year commitment for the United States --

MR. McCLELLAN: You might want to look at -- look at the planning we outlined last week. But go ahead, Kelly.

Q The President and Vice President have both been speaking very warmly about Senator Lieberman lately. And the Senator has suggested that the President should appoint a bipartisan working group on Iraq to meet perhaps weekly, including members of Congress, National Security officials, to talk about progress there, and to be able to report back to the American people. Is that an idea the President would welcome?

MR. McCLELLAN: Senator Lieberman has talked about the visible and practical progress that is being made on the ground, and he's talked about the importance of winning in Iraq. And I think while there may be disarray and disagreement within the Democratic Party, Senator Lieberman is someone who is firmly committed to supporting our troops and succeeding in Iraq. He recognizes the importance of victory there and the importance of succeeding.

Q So is his suggestion something the administration would embrace?

MR. McCLELLAN: I haven't had a chance to look at what he said today, Kelly, so I'll have to take a look at that. But we work very closely with him in the war on terrorism, and we appreciate his leadership, and we appreciate his ideas. And I'll take a look at that and see if there's anything else to add.

All right, thank you.

END 1:16 P.M. EST

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For Immediate Release
Office of the Press Secretary
November 16, 2006

Press Gaggle by Tony Snow

Aboard Air Force One
En route Washington, D.C.

12:15 P.M. EDT

MR. SNOW: Hello, all, let's gaggle. All right, first on the President's day, let's see — aboard Air Force One, since we've lifted off, there have been two head-of-state calls, one to President Antonio Sacca of El Salvador, and also Peru's President-elect, Alan Garcia. The Salvadoran call, primarily about immigration. On Peru, they talked first about congratulations on winning the election, the President passed them on; talked about defending and extending democracy in the region; and also working together on issues of free trade.

Coming up today on the President's schedule: When we land he'll be meeting with bicameral Republican congressional leadership. That's a sort of standard, regular meeting on a broad range of issues. There will be a swearing in for Dirk Kempthorne as Secretary of the Interior. And then, as you know, about five different codels went to Iraq during the break. There will be a meeting with members of both Houses and both parties about Iraq.

And I believe that's everything on today's public schedule. Questions.

Q Tony, how does the President analyze the results of the 50th congressional district in California?

MR. SNOW: Well, he's happy that Brian Bilbray won. Look, it was a close and tight race all along. But it's also interesting to note that in a case like this, everybody was trying to look for a bellwether. I think a lot of critics were hoping that this would be a kind of bellwether so that they could say that the Republican Party and the presidency were in peril. And they clearly -- their hopes were clearly frustrated.

Q So not a bellwether, then?

MR. SNOW: No, it was a tight race. It was a race that in many ways was governed by a series of local issues and it was a tough race for Republicans. Here you had Duke Cunningham having to leave Congress; and you had Brian Bilbray, whose activities as a lobbyist had been brought up as a campaign issue; and having missed votes while traveling had been an issue. That's a tough election.

And, furthermore, one of the things we've noticed in looking at polling in recent weeks is that people who stick with the President on immigration, on the issue, that tends to be attractive over the long run when people hear about comprehensive reform. Representative Bilbray didn't support that — nevertheless, we congratulate him on his victory. It was a tough race.

Q Is it true that the United States has agreed to allow Iran to have uranium conversion?

MR. SNOW: No. I would walk you back a little bit. Maybe the most important point to make about what has gone on is, number one, this is not a U.S.-Iran negotiation, period. It's still a multilateral world community with Iran. Number two, the precondition of suspending uranium enrichment-related and reprocessing activities -- that is still an absolute condition, and it is agreed upon by the United States, by the P5 plus one, by the IAEA. Everybody has agreed on that condition.

Again, Iran has to do that to get to the table to be able to discuss incentives and disincentives. I know that a lot of characterizations have been made in the press by people who may have indirect or, in some cases, incomplete knowledge of what was offered. But we're not going to go into the details; we've said that before and I'll say it

again. But I will reiterate the fundamental point, which is that the precondition of putting an end to all -- suspending all enrichment-related and reprocessing activities, that is still the precondition and it's agreed upon by all parties who have gone to talk with the government in Tehran.

Q So the answer is "no"?

MR. SNOW: The question was -- again, nothing happens -- I am not going to negotiate from here. We are not going to talk about specifics in the negotiation. And, furthermore, I'm just not going to get into any -- it was a general question that got a specific answer. I'm not going to talk about specific proffers.

Q Is it on the table that down the road, that if they come back to the table that they would be allowed to --

MR. SNOW: Again, I'm not going into specific proffers; we're just not going to do that.

Q Well, you said that our reporting is wrong.

MR. SNOW: Here's what you're supposed to take: There is no change in the administration position. There has been the insinuation that somehow there was a step back from the notion that Iran had to suspend. There is no change in that position on the part of the negotiating countries. So that's what I meant by that answer.

Q But you're not commenting on the reporting that the U.S. would contribute to uranium enrichment or --

MR. SNOW: Again, what I'm telling you is a lot of stuff has been put in play by people who may not have full knowledge of what was actually in the document. I will steer you back to my fundamental point, which is, Iran must suspend uranium enrichment-related and reprocessing activities -- you probably can say this by memory now. They have to do that to get to the table, period. That has not changed.

Q Did the President have any reaction to the reports yesterday about all those servicemen who had their records apparently compromised in that theft?

MR. SNOW: Well, I didn't talk about it -- I didn't talk to him about it, but I think -- you may recall that what happened is we got this report, and Chairman -- I mean, Secretary Nicholson -- I know, it's different jobs, at least I didn't say "Ambassador" -- Secretary Nicholson said they had to go back and they had to match between a database at the Veterans Administration and the hard drive, and said that there may be further clarifications of what's going on.

At this point, we continue to encourage people who may have concerns to contact the website or the phone number -and, unfortunately, I don't have them on me right now, but the VA has been leaning forward, so anybody who has concerns about the possible compromise of any information ought to contact the VA numbers, and they can walk them through. So far there has been no evidence of any identity theft, but we obviously remain concerned about the story.

Q What about the report out of the European watchdog group that 20-some-odd countries participated or allowed the rendition flights? And can you give us any reaction to that?

Q We can't hear the question.

MR. SNOW: He's asking about the rendition story. Several points to make on rendition. Number one, rendition is something that has been practiced by nations for a very long time. Carlos the Jackal, you may recall, by rendition ended up in a French jail. Nations have to work together on intelligence matters. It's also very important to stress that the United States does not condone torture, does not practice torture. Torture is illegal and we acknowledge and follow all international laws.

Furthermore, we will not agree to send anybody to a nation or place that practices torture. So when it comes to the rendition things, those are the important pieces to remember. It's also important to remember again that international cooperation in the war on terror is essential for winning, and rendition is not something that began with this administration, and it's certainly going to be practiced, I'm sure, in the future.

Q There are reports saying that there was human rights violations --

MR. SNOW: I am not going to respond to a report.

Q Is the President aware of a soldier, I believe, in California, who is going to become today the first person to refuse publicly his assignment to Iraq? And does the President have a position on whether he should be excused?

MR. SNOW: No, I don't. For that I'd refer you back to the Pentagon for comment on it.

Q The Senate just rejected the constitutional amendment to ban gay marriage. Leaders in the House say they still plan to take it up. Does the President think that's a good use of their time, when it's clear they don't have the votes in Congress to get it passed?

MR. SNOW: Well, I'd leave that to members of the House to decide. Again, Nedra, as you know, it's possible for members of Congress to take up a whole lot of issues at once -- in fact, it's their job. And this is an issue on which, I dare say, many members want to express themselves. I'm not going to tell them what to put on their legislative calendar.

Q Does the President have any reaction to the failure?

MR. SNOW: Well, he understands that this is an issue that people are going to want to think about. And he believes strongly that marriage is between a man and a woman. There is one more vote in the Senate than there was last time around. It is an issue he will continue to support.

Q Is he disappointed?

MR. SNOW: You know, I don't want to characterize state of mind on it. There will be a statement out later, and we'll see if there's any expression of his emotional condition.

Q He lobbied for this, or spoke out in support of it yesterday and over the weekend. So a cause that he championed has lost -- so does he --

MR. SNOW: It's fair enough, Jessica. The President understands that on an issue like this, it tends to evolve in response to things that are going on around the country. He has spoken repeatedly on the fact that nationwide, in a number of states, voters in a number of states and legislatures have defined marriage as being between a man and a woman, only to have courts overturn it. And he said that he wishes it hadn't come to this, that judicial activism is a concern. This is an issue that will play out over time, and the defeat does not mean that he's despondent or that he gives up on it. He knows that this is a long fight.

Q Tony, now that the Iranians have been presented the incentives package, are you at liberty to describe the package, the contents?

MR. SNOW: No.

Q Getting back to immigration. Are there things in the immigration bill that would prevent the President from signing it? Has he laid out what sort of the "black area" would be?

MR. SNOW: The President doesn't negotiate against himself. What he really wants to do is work with members of both Houses of Congress. As he pointed out today, a year ago, everybody was saying, put it off, don't do it, it's too hot. Now you've had the House and Senate both adopt legislation with regard to immigration. And the President is making it very clear, I think, that he wants a comprehensive bill, or new set of bills, if necessary -- comprehensive immigration reform. And that is going to continue to be his position.

I think it's also important to note that as the President gets out and talks about this, people begin to understand his position better. They get to see it. We had -- today, he had the opportunity to speak with people who had

come here and become citizens, who had started businesses. He had an opportunity to sit in on a classroom, and some of you were in there. And this helps dramatize what's going on. Today he was dramatizing not only importance, but how it happens that you do assimilation.

He's going to sign an executive order when he returns that is going to mobilize federal departments and agencies to figure out ways to make it easier for people who want to become American citizens, and who are pursuing a legal path -- that is whatever path has been so defined; I'm not going to try to get into prejudging the legislation -- make it easier for people to assimilate by learning the language, learning the culture, learning history, learning civics, and being able to integrate into American society and take full advantage of what the President described, the old phrase, the American Dream.

So that's what he's doing. He's not going to get into the process of saying, this is what I demand. The President is not making demands right now. What he's trying to do is to lead, to lay out principles. And one of the points he's been making the last two days is that there is not a lot of disagreement on the principles he's been talking about. So he's hoping that members of both Houses are going to be able to work together to go ahead and accomplish the chore of having a comprehensive immigration package.

Q There seems to be substantial disagreement on the idea of the pathway to citizenship and legalization that the President outlined. Do you see any hopes for some kind of compromise there?

MR. SNOW: That's not what -- again, you're asking me to try to engage in negotiations. I'm not going to do it. The President has made it pretty clear what he wants.

And again, I think what happens, too, is as people begin to see his position, I think it has some effect --that politicians and citizens will be taking note. They'll be getting a fuller understanding of where he stands and what he wants. And that always has an impact, when the President takes that kind of a stand.

Q At the top, you said that when he gets back he's meeting with members of the House and Senate?

MR. SNOW: There are two meetings. There's a bicameral meeting with Republican leaders, and then there's a bipartisan meeting with people who have just come back from Iraq. There were five different codels that were over in Iraq.

Q The topic is going to be Iraq, then, or --

MR. SNOW: No, no, no. The first meeting -- he meets fairly regularly with the bipartisan leadership, and they'll talk about a whole bunch of stuff. I'm sure immigration and taxes and all that stuff will come up. The second one is specifically about Iraq.

Q Do you know the times on those?

MR. SNOW: Yes. I think -- let's see, the Republican meeting is at 1:55 p.m., and the Iraq meeting is at 3:25 p.m.

Q Yesterday when the President was asked about Somalia, he said that when he gets back, he's going to strategize with Secretary Rice. Is there any plan for a meeting on Somalia, in particular?

MR. SNOW: I don't think there's a specific meeting. When the President meets with Secretary Rice -- or, for the matter, with Secretary Rumsfeld -- they tend to talk about a lot of stuff. And, obviously, with Secretary Rice, you're not going to have a meeting just on Somalia -- you've got Iran, you've got Iraq, you've got a lot of things. But it certainly will come up. And I don't know if they're going to be talking by phone. Secretary Rice comes over a lot. I don't have any specific guidance, but I'm sure it's going to come up quite soon.

Q -- on Maliki, and the President's confidence in their government, how it's evolving, and the violence in Iraq?

MR. SNOW: Well, once again, we are looking forward to the Prime Minister being able to get in place his interior and defense ministries. That's obviously an important step.

Q He's not troubled by the delay?

MR. SNOW: He understands that when you're doing government formation, especially in a brand new parliamentary system, it's a complicated chore.

Q Is the President planning to meet with Secretary Rice --

MR. SNOW: I don't -- like I said, I don't know. There's nothing on the calendar that I have. But they meet frequently and they talk frequently. There's nothing on today's calendar.

Q All right, thank you.

MR. SNOW: All right, thanks.

END 12:30 P.M. EDT

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Jordan's Spy Agency: Holding Cell for the CIA

Foreign Terror Suspects Tell of Torture

By Craig Whitlock
Washington Post Foreign Service
Saturday, December 1, 2007; A01

AMMAN, Jordan -- Over the past seven years, an imposing building on the outskirts of this city has served as a secret holding cell for the CIA.

The building is the headquarters of the General Intelligence Department, Jordan's powerful spy and security agency. Since 2000, at the CIA's behest, at least 12 non-Jordanian terrorism suspects have been detained and interrogated here, according to documents and former prisoners, human rights advocates, defense lawyers and former U.S. officials.

In most of the cases, the spy center served as a covert way station for CIA prisoners captured in other countries. It was a place where they could be hidden after being arrested and kept for a few days or several months before being moved on to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, or CIA prisons elsewhere in the world.

Others were arrested while transiting through Jordan, including two detained during stopovers at Amman's international airport. Another prisoner, a microbiology student captured in Pakistan in the weeks after the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, has not been seen since he was flown to Amman on a CIA plane six years ago.

The most recent case to come to light involved a Palestinian detainee, Marwan al-Jabour, who was transferred to Jordan last year from a CIA-run secret prison, then released several weeks later in the Gaza Strip.

The General Intelligence Department, or GID, is perhaps the CIA's most trusted partner in the Arab world. The Jordanian agency has received money, training and equipment from the CIA for decades and even has a public English-language Web site. The relationship has deepened in recent years, with U.S. officials praising their Jordanian counterparts for the depth of their knowledge regarding al-Qaeda and other radical Islamic networks.

In the aftermath of Sept. 11, however, the GID was attractive for another reason, according to former U.S. counterterrorism officials and Jordanian human rights advocates. Its interrogators had a reputation for persuading tight-lipped suspects to talk, even if that meant using abusive tactics that could violate U.S. or international law.

"I was kidnapped, not knowing anything of my fate, with continuous torture and interrogation for the whole of two years," Al-Haj Abdu Ali Sharqawi, a Guantanamo prisoner from Yemen, recounted in a written account of his experiences in Jordanian custody. "When I told them the truth, I was tortured and beaten."

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Sharqawi was captured in Karachi, Pakistan, in February 2002 in a joint Pakistani-U.S. operation. Although the Guantanamo Bay prison had just opened, the CIA flew him instead to Amman, where he was imprisoned for 19 months, according to his account and flight records. He was later taken to another CIA-run secret prison, his statement says, before he was finally moved to Guantanamo in February 2004.

Sharqawi said he was threatened with sexual abuse and electrocution while in Jordan. He also said he was hidden from officials of the International Committee for the Red Cross during their visits to inspect Jordanian prisons.

"I was told that if I wanted to leave with permanent disability both mental and physical, that that could be arranged," Sharqawi said in his April 2006 statement, which was released by a London-based attorney, Clive Stafford Smith, who represents Guantanamo inmates. "They said they had all the facilities of Jordan to achieve that. I was told that I had to talk, I had to tell them everything."

Bush administration officials have said they do not hand over terrorism suspects to countries that are likely to abuse them. For several years, however, the State Department has cited widespread allegations of torture by Jordan's security agencies in its annual report cards on human rights.

Independent monitors have become increasingly critical of Jordan's record. Since 2006, the United Nations, Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch have issued reports on abuses in Jordan, often singling out the General Intelligence Department.

Former prisoners have reported that their captors were expert in two practices in particular: falaqa, or beating suspects on the soles of their feet with a truncheon and then, often, forcing them to walk barefoot and bloodied across a salt-covered floor; and farruj, or the "grilled chicken," in which prisoners are handcuffed behind their legs, hung upside down by a rod placed behind their knees, and beaten.

In a report released in January 2007, Manfred Nowak, the U.N. special investigator for torture, found that "the practice of torture is routine" at GID headquarters and concluded "that there is total impunity for torture and ill-treatment in the country."

Officials with the GID did not respond to a letter seeking an interview for this article. The Jordanian Foreign Ministry also did not respond to interview requests.

The CIA declined to comment on its relationship with the GID but defended in general the covert transfer of terrorism suspects to other countries, a practice known as rendition.

"The United States does not transfer individuals to any country if it believes they will be tortured there," said Paul Gimigliano, a CIA spokesman. "Setting aside the myths, rendition is, in fact, a lawful, effective tool that has been used over the years on a very limited scale, and is designed to take terrorists off the street."

'In Jordan, Nobody Asks'

Immediately after Sept. 11, the CIA had nowhere to hold terrorism suspects it had captured abroad. The military prison at Guantanamo did not open until January 2002. And it took the CIA until the spring of 2002 to get its own network of secret overseas prisons up and running.

Short on options, the CIA sought help from its counterparts in Jordan. Soon, CIA airplanes began

carrying prisoners to Amman.

Jamil Qasim Saeed Mohammed, a Yemeni microbiology student, was captured in a U.S.-Pakistani operation in Karachi a few weeks after 9/11 on suspicion of helping to finance al-Qaeda operations. Witnesses reported seeing masked men take him aboard a Gulfstream V jet at the Karachi airport Oct. 24, 2001.

Records show that the plane was chartered by a CIA front company and that it flew directly to Amman. Mohammed has not been seen since. Amnesty International said it has asked the Jordanian government for information on his whereabouts but has not received an answer.

About the same time, Jamal Alawi Mari, another Yemeni citizen, was apprehended at his home in Karachi by Pakistani and U.S. agents. Records show that U.S. officials suspected him of working for Islamic charities that allegedly supported al-Qaeda.

Soon after, Mari was also flown by the CIA to Amman. "They never told me where I was going," he testified later before a U.S. military tribunal. "I found out later I was in Jordan."

Mari said he was imprisoned for four months in Jordan, out of sight of visiting Red Cross officials. In early 2002, he was taken to Guantanamo and remains imprisoned there.

Defense lawyers and human rights advocates in Amman said it wasn't a surprise that the CIA turned to Jordan's security agency for assistance.

"In America, people will ask about any breach of the law," said Younis Arab, a lawyer who has represented a CIA prisoner brought to Jordan. "Here in Jordan, nobody asks. So the Americans get the Jordanians to do the dirty work."

Other Jordanian lawyers cited unconfirmed reports that the CIA had transferred high-ranking al-Qaeda leaders to Jordan for interrogation. Although hard evidence is elusive, some former inmates have reported being detained in the same wing as Ramzi Binalshibh, a key planner in the Hamburg cell that carried out the Sept. 11 hijackings, said Abdulkareem al-Shureidah, an Amman lawyer.

"He was detained in Jordanian jails, definitely," Shureidah said of Binalshibh, who was kept in CIA custody in undisclosed locations from the time of his capture in Karachi in September 2002 until September 2006, when he was transferred to Guantanamo. "The U.S. brought all kinds of persons here from around the world."

Samieh Khreis, an Amman lawyer who has represented former Guantanamo inmates from Jordan, said testimony by former prisoners and others in Jordan reinforced a long-held suspicion that the CIA ran a satellite operation inside headquarters of the General Intelligence Department.

"Of course they had a jail here, a secret jail -- of course, no question," he said. "If they were to put me in that GID building over there, in my mind, it might as well be an American jail."

Khreis said the Jordanian spy service has a well-deserved reputation for using dubious tactics to force confessions. But he said the CIA sent prisoners to Amman primarily to take advantage of the GID's knowledge of Islamic radical groups.

"Torture is not the main reason," he said.

A Flat Denial

On June 26, 2006, just after 6 p.m., Nowak, the U.N. investigator, paid a surprise visit to GID headquarters in Amman.

The Jordanian government had previously agreed to give Nowak carte blanche to inspect any prison in the country, with no preconditions and unfettered access to inmates. As a new member of the U.N. Human Rights Council, Jordan was eager to win Nowak's seal of approval. GID officials permitted Nowak to tour its prison wing. But they refused to allow him to speak with prisoners in private. When Nowak asked about allegations that the CIA had used the building as a proxy jail, department officials said the reports were untrue.

"The response was just very flat, a simple denial, 'We don't know anything about that,'" Nowak recalled in an interview.

In interviews with former GID prisoners, Nowak said, he heard repeated, credible reports of inmates being subjected to electric shocks, sleep deprivation and various forms of beatings, including farruj and falaqa.

He said several inmates reported that their chief tormentor was Col. Ali Birjak, head of the GID's counterterrorism unit and one of the officials who had denied cooperating with the CIA. Based on those interviews, Nowak recommended in his report that Birjak be investigated by Jordanian authorities on torture charges.

In a written response to Nowak's findings on Oct. 10, 2006, the Jordanian government called the torture allegations "untrue" and noted that they were lodged by people with criminal records.

"It is common for prisoners to make false allegations about torture in a pathetic attempt to evade punishment and to influence the court," the government wrote.

In interviews with The Washington Post, however, former prisoners of the GID gave similar accounts of physical abuse.

Masaad Omer Behari, a Sudanese citizen, spent 86 days in the department's custody in early 2003 after he was arrested during a stopover at Amman's international airport.

Behari said his interrogators wanted to know about his activities in Vienna, where he had lived for more than a decade. He had been asked many of the same questions previously by the FBI and Austrian security officials about an alleged plot to bomb the U.S. Embassy in Vienna in 1998, he said, though he had denied any role and was never charged.

While he was in custody in Amman, Behari said, guards meted out a combination of falaqa and farruj. They struck the soles of his feet with batons while he was handcuffed and hanging upside down, then doused him with cold water and forced him to walk over a salt-strewn floor.

"I thought they were going to kill me," he said. "I said my prayers, thinking I was going to die."

Researcher Julie Tate in Washington contributed to this report.

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